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HIS MASCOT

By Harry B. Kennon.

OBLIVIOUS to the stench of stale tobacco fumes, mingled with effluvia of many liquors and liquorish breathings, that would have nauseated him at any other time but this the climax of his affairs, Frank Ferguson, cashier of the Penny Savings, stuck to the game. Winner at first, he had latterly been losing at every turn of the wheel, and his straight run of hard luck, coupled with his plucky venturing to recoup, held the attention of the motley gang of which he was part. He cared nothing for the crowd, arguing himself unknown to those among whom he would never appear again; nothing for the place, an obscure hell, notorious to complacency of the police and to the shady clientele as a room of high and dangerous play. What he did care for, with a defaulter's desperation, was the chance of money gained by 'staying in." He cared for that almightily.

"Fetch a drink," he jerked over his shoulder—"brandy!"

Then he turned his eyes back to the table to see his money vanish. Once more he resolved to stake. "If he lost?—why then—." He put the "then" aside and drew a thin packet of new bills from his vest pocket. As he did so, a coal black hand passed him his brandy. The powerful negro, a "bouncer," Ferguson mistakenly supposed, grinned at him while he drank; and over the rim of the "pony" Ferguson noticed that one of the black's shoulders was higher than the other.

"Hump-back coon for luck!" flashed through the gambler's brain. He reached out the hand that held the bills and stroked the negro's deformity. The crowd laughed its more or less drunken appreciation of the joke.

The insulted man drew back and cursed him.

"You damned nigger! Ah! You would, would you!" exclaimed Ferguson, as the negro struck out at him, his good natured grin transformed to a snarl of hatred.

"Aw, chuck the coon! G'wan wid de game!" clamored the crowd.

The negro was hustled out, the crowd settled down, and Ferguson only thought of the "mascot" as bringing him luck. For he won and won, not only recovering his losses, but gaining sufficiently more to margin certain irregularities, his cruelest name for criminal borrowings. At three in the morning he called up a cab and left, carrying gains and good spirits for company.

* * *

Ferguson was clear headed enough, controlled anxiety had attended to that, but he had the brains to know that clarity of thinking begotten of brandy—he had imbibed more than one "pony"—would not last, and that his desk at the bank would find him fatwitted for his peculiarly careful work of the morning unless he took preventive measures. He had himself driven to his Turkish bath, deserted at that hour but for Mike, the custodian, and a few sleepers dead to the world. Mike recognized him immediately with a discreet smile of surprise, but Mike had been too long on the job to be staggered by untimely invasions of patrons, however respectable.

"Charley about?" asked Ferguson, demanding his accustomed rubber.

"Charley's off this two hours," answered Mike.

'Then give me the best you've got."

"Sam's comin' on. He's in the locker now."

"Who's Sam Any good?"

"Extra night man. First-rate."

"All right; I'll peel—and Mike"

"Yis sor."

"I'm staying the rest of the night. Don't have me called until eight fifteen. Not later, mind. Due at the bank at nine thirty. Coffee, of course."

"I'll tell Sam. Go off watch when he shows up."

"For how long?"

"Nine o'clock, sor. Charley comes on at six.

"Make it back an hour earlier, will you? and buy me a shirt. What—15—cuffs attached—and a collar, like this."

"Sure," assented Mike, scenting his tip. "Any valuables, sor?"

"None to mention," Ferguson yawned. "Won't trouble to deposit. Room G's safe enough."

Ferguson finished stripping, locked the door of his room, gartered the key around his wrist by its rubber band, and was assisted by Mike, wholly disregardful of his unsteadiness, to the hot room. Mike brought a cold sponge for his head and disappeared. Brnady and the high temperature became so overpowering that he sought the shampoo to avoid syncope. A slab all prepared for a bather invited; he sat on it, mind muddled, then stretched himself full length, face down to avoid the one electric light, and fell fast asleep.

He was brought back to semi-consciousness by having the rubber band slipped off his wrist. Drowsily turning his head he saw the bare black arm of his rubber as he placed the key on its hook.

"Oh! its you, is it?"

'Yes, sah."

"Well, get going."

The tepid water soothed Ferguson into a pleasant slumber which the gentle and firm manipulations of the rubber in no-way disturbed. His next return to the world of things came with the words:

"Turn ovah, sah."

Too languid for any effort he allowed the man to shift him over on to his back. He never opened his eyes.

But as the strong, smooth hands slipped up towards his throat and tightened there, as the iron fingers clenched, Ferguson awakened to the fearful fact that his mascot held him in the grip of death.

Neither man uttered a word, Ferguson could not. The fiend slowly and surely strangled the life out of him. Then he reached up for the key, grunted, and disappeared.

* * *

From what pursuit? Frank Ferguson was not all that was strangled—not by any means. The verdict brought in was heartfailure; the reputation of the Turkish bath was saved—Mike knew his business. The directors of the Penny Savings passed resolutions to the memory of their dead cashier. If the word "Hush" appears between the lines of those resolutions, neither the public nor Ferguson's family, who treasure them, are conscious of it. The Penny Savings is a going institution, capital unimpaired. Hush!

Ferguson's mascot had brought to his victim better luck than either would ever know. "Hump-backed coon for luck! Hush!"

Traveler (in Southern hotel)—Can I get anything to eat here?

Samboo—Yes, sah.

Treveler—Such as what?

Sambo—Such as it is, sah.—Boston Transcript.

"I've been reading an article on electricity, John," said the wife as she laid down a copy of a technical magazine which she had been perusing. "And it appears before long we'll be able to get pretty nearly everything we want just by touching a button."

"It will never pay here," growled the husband. "You would never be able to get anything in that way."

"Why not, John?"

"Because nothing on earth would ever make you touch a button. Look at my shirt!"—National Food Magazine.

Pete Johnson, Ethiopian, operated a ferry across the Alabama river. One day he was accosted by a poor white stranger who wanted to cross, but hadn't the wherewithal. Pete scratched his woolly poll, perplexedly, then queried. "Don' yo' got no money 't'all?" "No," was the dejected reply. "But it doan' cost yo' but three cents ter cross," insisted Pete. "I know; but I hain't got three cents." After a final inward think, Pete remarked: "I done tell yo' what; a man what ain't got three cents am jes' as well off on dis side ob de ribber as on de odder!!"

Once, years ago, in a Butte City convention, the gentlemen from the Green Isle had things so entirely their own way that they did not propose to give any other nationality a representation on the ticket. Finally, when all the available material was used up, a delegate arose, it is related, and nominated Patrick O'Hara for justice of the peace. "Who is Patrick O'Hara, and where does he live?" inquired a delegate. "He's a friend of mine, and he lives in Ireland," was the reply; "but he'll be over on the next steamer."

Aunty Daniels should slap those cribbing Annapolis midshipmen right on the wrist.—San Francisco News Letter.

Mr. Bryan's prohibition views explain why his numerous statements have no punch in them.—Philadelphia North American.